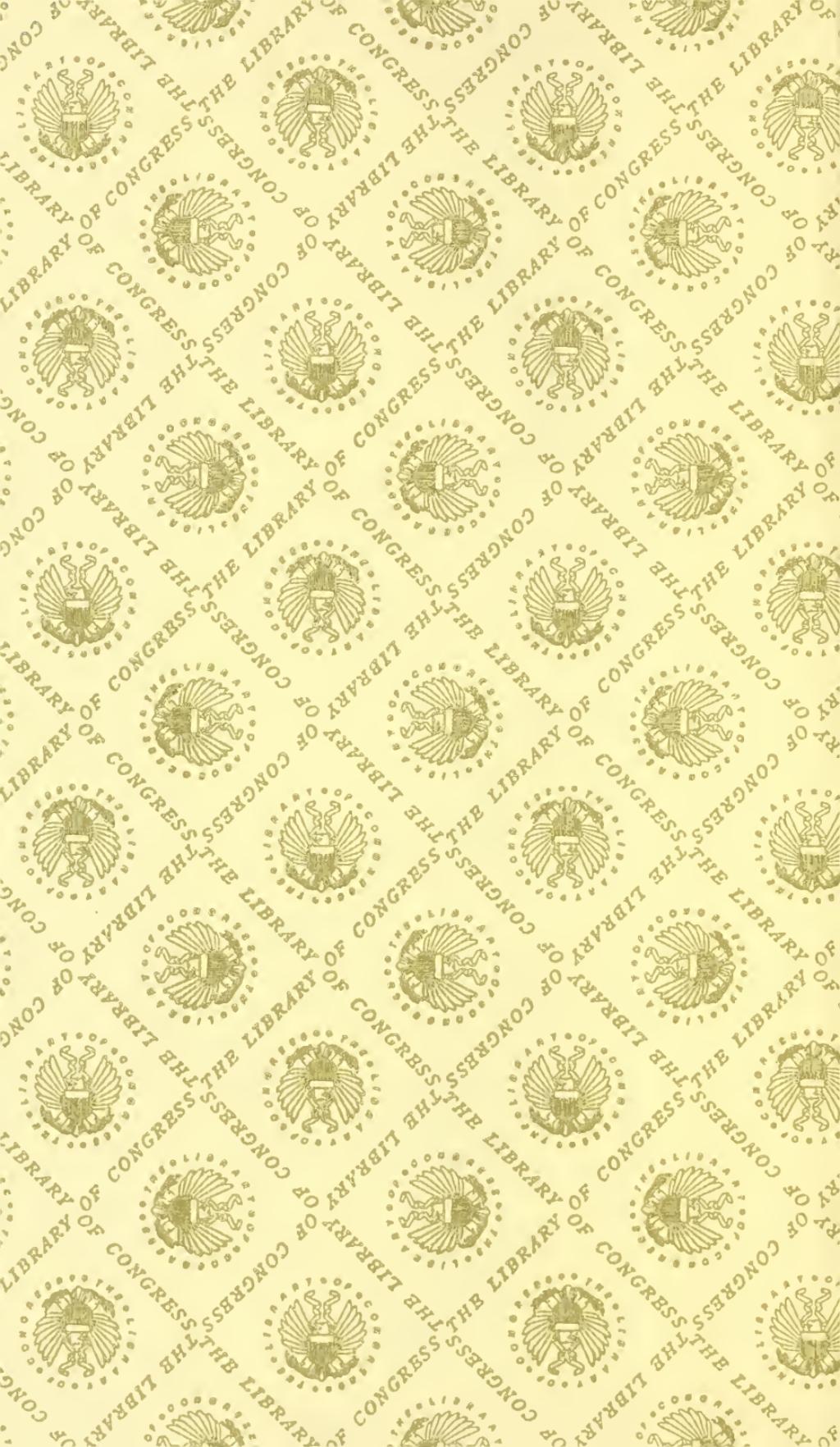


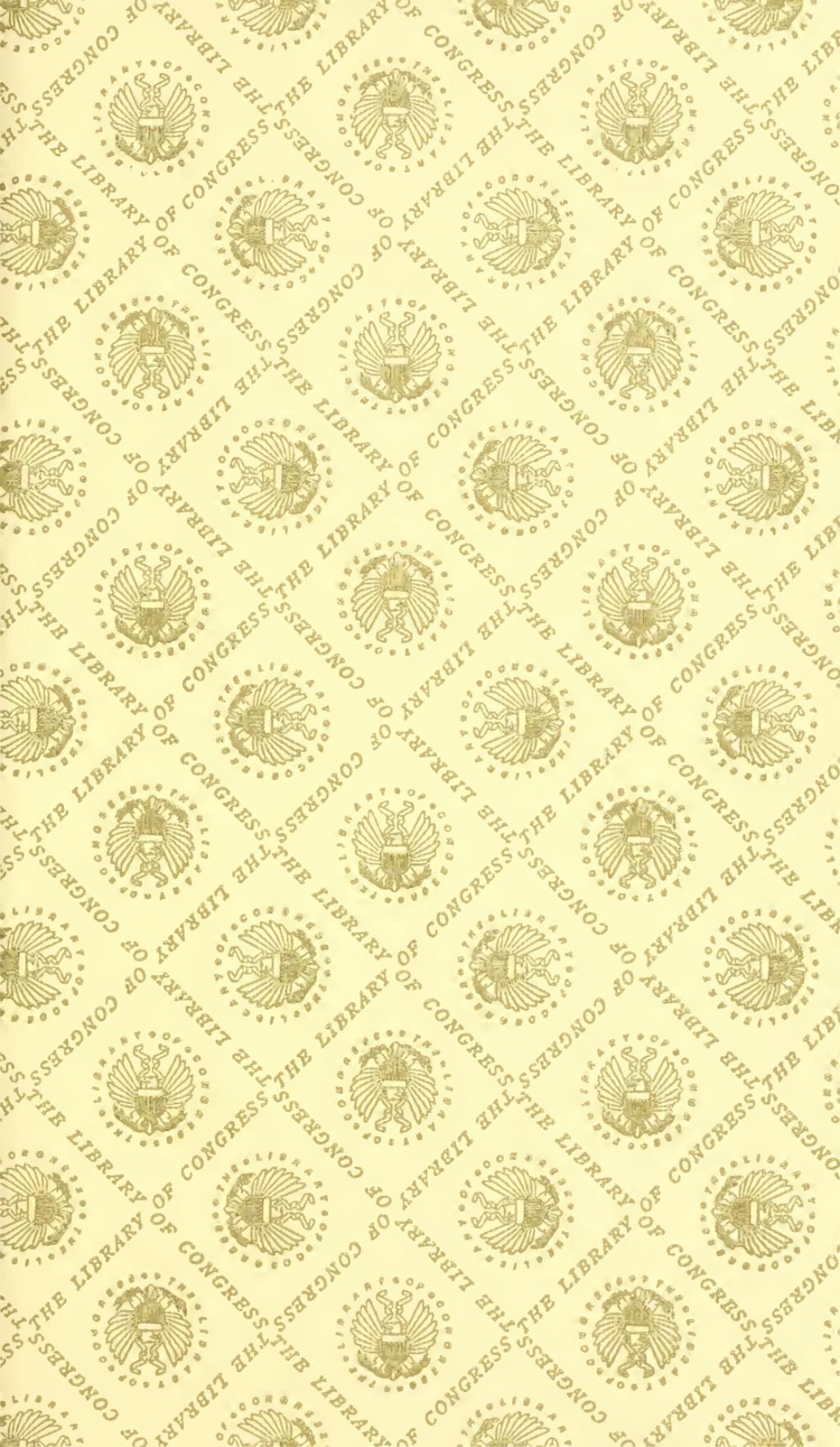
E 440
.5
.E52

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00001735810







LETTER FROM HON. ALFRED ELY.

[From the Rochester "Democrat and American" of Jan. 15, 1861.]

The following letter from the Hon. ALFRED ELY, in reply to one addressed to him by AARON ERICKSON, Esq., urging a support of the Crittenden proposition, will be read with interest and satisfaction by the people of this district. Mr. Ely states his objections to that proposition with frankness, and urges strong reasons against its adoption. He discusses the whole question of the impending revolution with ability, and sums up by stating the true reason why it has made such rapid strides during the last sixty days. It was directly aided by the most influential men in the Federal Government, and, until within a few days, has met with no check from that quarter.

We need scarcely commend the letter to the attention of our readers. The absorbing interest of the subject will secure for it a general and attentive perusal:

WASHINGTON, January 7, 1861.

DEAR SIR: Your letter of the 24th ultimo has received from me that careful consideration due alike to the source from which it emanated, and the importance of the subject to which it relates. I am not willing to admit that any one of my constituents feels a deeper solicitude for the preservation of our revered Union than I do. Nevertheless, I find it impossible to concur fully with you as to the course which should be adopted by the Republicans in Congress, with a view to averting the dangers of dissolution, which now threaten us.

It is my sincere belief that the revolutionary movement, which has progressed with such fearful strides in certain Southern States during the last sixty days, owes much of its present head-way to the fatal mistake made by our Federal Executive, and concurred in by many Union-loving men, of treating it, in its inception, as a disorder to be yielded to, and palliated by indulgence and concession, instead of being met by unequivocal exhibition of a firm and resolute purpose to maintain the authority of the Constitution and laws against all attempts at forcible resistance whatsoever or by whomsoever made.

I do not believe that this revolutionary movement can now be, or ever could have been, arrested by concessions from the North. It was set on foot, and has been pushed forward by men who have long been anxious for a dissolution of the Union, and who have been seeking for a pretext and a suitable occasion to make the attempt they are now making to sever its bonds.

They ask no concessions, and will accept none. They give us plainly to understand that no concessions we could propose would induce them to pause a moment in the mad career of rebellion and treason in which they have embarked.

I fully concur with you as to the importance of preventing, if possible, the "conservative border States of the South" from joining in this secession movement. The people of these States are more deeply

interested in the preservation of the Union than any other section of our common country ; and, I believe, the reflecting portion of them duly appreciate their condition in this respect. Moreover, they are in a position to exert a more salutary influence for its preservation, if they will.

In the present crisis, it is scarcely too much to say, that they hold the fate of this Union in their hands.

The late Presidential election demonstrated that the Union men are in a decided majority in all these border slave States, even if we reckon as such only those who voted against Breckinridge and Lane.

I trust, however, that only a small proportion of those who voted that ticket in those States are at heart desirous of breaking up the Union. But how has this open rebellion against the Constitution and laws been met by those who professed, in the Presidential canvass, pre-eminent fidelity and devotion to the Union? From whom should it have received a more emphatic rebuke than from those who triumphed in those border States, in that canvass, under the significant motto of "The Union, the Constitution, and THE ENFORCEMENT of the laws?" And yet, how has their influence been exerted in this crisis? Strong in numbers—strong in wealth and intelligence—strong in the moral power of their position, they could have overawed the revolutionary movement in the beginning of it, if they had boldly stood up to their patriotic motto.

But, instead of this, we have seen them timidly succumb to an insolent and audacious minority of their own section, intent upon their ruin—ceasing to demand "enforcement of the laws," as soon as anybody threatened to resist them—and giving encouragement to rebellion and treason, by insisting that they shall not be opposed; and some of them even threatening to join the rebellion themselves, unless unreasonable concessions, never before thought of, are made, in the form of radical modifications of the Constitution.

If these border States could be attached more firmly to the Union by any concessions within the bounds of reason, any that could be made without an abandonment of the fundamental principles which the people of the free States have so recently assented to by an emphatic voice, no one would be more ready than I am to grant them. For instance, I would not only consent to but advise the repeal of all laws enacted by any of the free States to obstruct citizens of slave States in the exercise of their constitutional rights of reclaiming fugitives from labor, especially if the fugitive slave act were so modified as to guard against the use of it as an instrument for kidnapping free men. If any additional guarantees are required that the Federal power shall never be exerted to abolish slavery in States where it now exists, or to interfere in any way with the exclusive right of the people of those States to manage their domestic institutions in their own way, I can see no objections to giving them.

But we have no indications that any concessions, short of a constitutional guarantee of the right to carry slavery into Territories now free, would be at all satisfactory to citizens of those States, who are demanding concessions as a condition of remaining faithful to the Union.

The people of the free States will never consent to an amendment of the Constitution which shall make it, in express terms, a slavery-extending instrument. The people of the South have no more right to demand such a modification of the Constitution than we of the North have to demand that it shall be so amended as to make it an instrument for abolishing slavery in the States where it now exists.

Even if the present Congress should propose, and submit to the States for their approval, any amendment of the Constitution, by virtue of which any portion of the free Territory which we now possess or may hereafter acquire would be converted into slave Territory, the people of the free States would indignantly reject it.

Now, a few words in reference to the "Crittenden proposition to extend the Missouri compromise line to the Pacific," the rejection of which by the Senate Committee of thirteen you "deeply deplore." What is this proposition, but to establish slavery by an express constitutional sanction and guaranty in every foot of Territory which we now own or may hereafter acquire, where there is the remotest possibility of its ever going? So far as it would affect the Territory which we now possess, it might be of little or no practical importance, with the exception of a limited tract lying south of Kansas, which we are bound by treaties with Indian tribes not to include within the jurisdiction of any State.

New Mexico, (including Arizona,) is the only Territory we now possess south of that line. New Mexico has already, by an act of her Territorial Legislature, theoretically established slavery within her limits. And under the compromise acts of 1850, her people will have the right to choose, when they apply for admission into the Union, whether they enter it as a free or slave State. Practically, however, it is scarcely possible that negro slavery can ever exist there to any considerable extent. All the Territory which we own north of that line is now as secure against the introduction of slavery as is the State of New York. You will perceive, therefore, that this Crittenden proposition becomes practically important, mainly on account of its application to Territory hereafter to be acquired, and that its effect would be to give a constitutional sanction to slavery in every foot of Territory that we can ever acquire.

It should not be forgotten that the Senate Committee of thirteen did not finally reject this Crittenden proposition, until the southern members of that committee had refused to restrict its operation to the Territory we now own. Without such a restriction, it is simply a proposition to establish slavery by an express constitutional sanction in every foot of our national Territory, present or prospective, into which anybody would ever desire to take it. Practically, it would be just as effectual for the extension of slavery as the constitutional recognition of the doctrines of the Dred Scott decision.

There is another serious objection to this proposition: Give a constitutional sanction of slavery to all future acquisitions of Territory south of $36^{\circ} 30'$, and you offer the strongest possible inducements to the filibustering expeditions from the South for the conquest and annexation of Mexico and Central America. If our Government has found it difficult to restrain these filibustering raids in the absence of any such constitutional guaranty, and when those who encouraged and

set them on foot had to incur the risk of slavery exclusion, after conquest and annexation should be accomplished, how much more difficult would it be with that risk constitutionally provided against.

I can conceive of nothing that would so tend to hasten the consummation of that project, which the South has so long nursed, of seizing all the Territory south of us, on this continent, to the Isthmus of Panama, extending slavery over it, and thus securing a permanent preponderance of slave States in this Union.

So far as I have observed, most men who entertain the idea of arresting this revolutionary movement by demanding unreasonable concessions from the North, deprecate the use of force to overcome resistance to the constituted authorities, or to protect the federal property from unlawful seizure in the rebellious States.

The employment of force, they say, will lead to collision and civil war. But do they suppose that collision and civil war will be ultimately averted by permitting the people of the revolting States to resist the collection of the Federal revenue—to seize the Federal custom-houses, forts, arsenals, and magazines within their limits, and to appropriate the public arms and munitions of war to their own use, as means of overturning the Government?

No Republicans, and few Northern men of any party, admit the right of a State to secede at pleasure. And yet, what is this non-resistant policy but the strongest possible recognition of that right? If treason is not to be resisted when it sets the Federal laws at defiance, and seizes the Federal property in Charleston harbor, at what point is it to be resisted? When it shall have progressed to the Potomac, entered the National Metropolis, seized the navy yard and arsenal of this city, and taken forcible possession of the Capitol, the Treasury, and other public buildings here, is it still to meet no resistance; for fear of producing collision and civil war? It is idle to talk of arresting this revolution by palliatives and concessions. Forceable resistance to the constituted authorities and laws must be met and overcome by superior force, or our Government is already broken up, and the Union ordained by our fathers is merely an incident in the history of the past!

In conclusion, let me add, that the course of our Federal Executive, in succumbing to an insolent and arrogant band of rebels, retaining their open and avowed sympathisers and abettors in his Cabinet, and calling upon good and loyal citizens to pacify them by unreasonable concessions, has drifted the country into a more alarming condition than when your letter was written. If, as some recent events would seem to indicate, he has at length seen the error of his way, and resolved to amend his course, the Union-loving people of this country will be profoundly thankful for the change.

But he can never repair the mischief which his complicity with treason, attributable, it is to be hoped, more to the want of moral courage than to a corrupt heart, has inflicted upon the country!

Let him now do the utmost in his power to retrieve this false step, and he will enlist in his behalf the sympathies of an immense majority of the American people.

Yours, very respectfully,

ALFRED ELY.

To AARON ERICKSON, Esq., Rochester, N. Y.





